

IRLYN THE HARPER
THE QUEEN'S VIOL
AND OTHER SONGS

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON



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URLYN THE HARPER
THE QUEEN'S VIGIL
AND OTHER SONG

URLYN THE HARPER

AND OTHER SONG

BY

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1902



PR
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To J. P. AND E. J. F. G.

870363

Of the verses in this book, "Vashti" and "The Weaver" appeared first in *The Saturday Review*; "Blind" in *The Spectator*; and "Song" in *The Outlook*.

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URLYN THE HARPER.

“Brightness falls from the air;
Queens have died young and fair; . . .”

Thomas Nashe.

Persons

KING KARLORN.

QUEEN EVRYLONE.

URLYN.

Prelude

*Not these the songs I sing
Before the King,
Among red flaming lights
Of festal nights:
Not these the songs to slake
War thirst; or wake
To battle sleeping swords
Of laggard lords.*

*But under woven leaves
Hid shelter cool,
Where but the wood dove grieves
Above the pool,*

PRELUDE

*Deep-shadowed with clear green
The summer long,
Remembering the Queen
I loose my song.*

*Dreaming I bend above
My harp's loud strings,
While lord of lords is love
And king of kings:
Not these the songs to speed
The flowing mead:
Not those to stir the scorn
Of King Karlorn.*

Urlyn the Harper

I

THE King has sailed across the tide,
The sad old King with foam-white hair,
To bring him home another bride,
A spring-bright maiden fresh and fair
To light his days of winter care.

The King has sailed across the tide,
With galleys laden deep with gold,
And winged with sails of scarlet pride,
Whereon embroidered eagles old
Hover as o'er some April fold.

URLYN THE HARPER

The King has sailed across the tide:
He bade me toil ere his return
To make a song to meet his bride,
To tell how winter's heart may yearn
Towards spring, and for her raptures burn.

He comes again across the tide,
Yet naught have I for welcoming
Save "How may one spring flower abide
'Neath boughs that but remember spring
Because the birds no longer sing?"

URLYN . THE HARPER

II

Who is she that cometh from the waters of the
west?

Who is she that cometh from the land beyond
the sea

With eyes of waking spring-tide, full of April's
bright unrest?

Wandering winds and waters tell me, who is
she?

Who is she that cometh with the wind about her
blown,

Restless raiment gleaming full of colours of the
sea,

URLYN THE HARPER

Green as under-curve of wave, white as waters
overthrown?

Wandering winds and waters tell me, who is she?

Who is she that cometh with the dawn upon her
brow,

Dawn of April moving with white footsteps o'er
the sea

To light the land with glory of green branch and
leafy bough?

Wandering winds and waters tell me, who is she?

Who is she that cometh all among the bannered
throng,—

Triumph of bright banners o'er the sand dunes
by the sea—

Who is she that wakens my wild harp to won-
dering song?

Wandering winds and waters tell me, who is she?

URLYN THE HARPER

O my heart ! she cometh,—she whom thou hast
seen in dream

In lonely moonlight wandering by shimmering
grey sea,

Yet not for thee her coming, nor for thee the
April gleam :

Only winter winds and waters, heart, for thee !

URLYN THE HARPER

III.

At last, O night, I come to thee
Who friend hast ever been to me:
The weary day of feasting done,
All empty now the bridal board,
And quenched each taper's yellow light,
And sleeping every dame and lord,
At last, my freedom won,
I come to thee, O night.

All day I sang for Queen and King,
And made the striding rafters ring
From morning gleam to candle shine:
While naught I saw the whole day long

URLYN THE HARPER

Save two bright eyes that on me burned,
And all about me through my song,
To gloom more dark than thine
The light of noonday turned.

Never, O night, to thee I came
To quench in thy cool breast a flame
More keen, more fierce, more hunger-bright
Than this which dawn has lit in me,—
The dawn that broke so wild and fair
With April glories o'er the sea.
Quench thou the fire, O night,
Beneath thy dewy hair.

URLYN THE HARPER

IV.

IF I could sing my songs to her
Alone in some green place,
Would any wind of passion stir
The flame of her white face,

Till under shadow tangling hair
She'd bend above the pool
To hide a woman's wild despair
In darkling waters cool?

Or gazing with love-blinded eyes
Down dim unlitten shades
Would she, a Queen of Sorrow rise
To pass through homeward glades,

URLYN THE HARPER

And leave me without look or word
All desolate alone
To mourn unheeded and unheard,
Beside her empty throne?

URLYN THE HARPER

V.

DEEP in the heart of the greenwood I have
 builded a throne for my Love
'Mid palace of pillared trees branching, inwoven
 so thickly above,
That pale as the glimmer of stars noon hangs in
 the canopy dim,
And the dark, green hollows beneath it with
 silence eternal o'erbrim.

Deep in the dusk of the woodland I have builded
 a throne for my Queen
Of the oak and the fir and the cedar, close down
 by the clear shadowed green

URLYN THE HARPER

Of the Pool of the Vision of Healing, whose
waters, that silently well
From earth's heart, in the heart of the gazer
all sorrowful passion may quell.

Deep in the dark of the forest I have builded a
throne for my Dream:
And there in the noon of the night-tide, where
light of the moon may not gleam
In shimmering raiment before me, throned,
white, with a star on her brows
She sits, and I harp to the Vision in silence and
night of green boughs.

URLYN THE HARPER

VI.

O DAY that ever ends
The merciful swift night,
Filling the forest gloom
With quivering gray light,
Stay yet awhile, O stay, nor put my dream to
flight.

Close, close thy waking eyes
And turn again to sleep;
Let night, the lord of stars,
For once thy pathway keep,
Till he in weariness shall to thy shelter creep.

For night is starred with love,
And with clear visions bright;
But thou, on gleaming wing,
Bear'st darkness, bringing light.
O merciless cold dawn, I hear thy rustling flight!

URLYN THE HARPER

VII.

SHALL I gaze for awhile in the pool
Of the waters of rest,
Till the fulness thereof and the cool
Have entered my breast;

Till the flame of my love and the fire
That burns in my heart
Be quenched, and dream and desire
Be shivered apart;

That my days may be filled as a cup
With fresh flowing peace
From the heart of the earth welling up,
Till the life-light shall cease?

URLYN THE HARPER

Nay, not for the peace of the earth
That has been from the first,
Would I yield the keen passion of death,
The rapture of thirst.

URLYN THE HARPER

VIII.

I SANG of lovers, and she praised my song,
The while the King looked on her with cold eyes,
And 'twixt them on the throne sat mailed wrong.

I sang of Launcelot and Guenevere,
While in her face I saw old sorrows rise,
And throned between them cowered naked Fear.

I sang of Tristram and La Belle Isoud,
And how they fled the anger of King Mark
To live and love, deep sheltered in a wood.

Then bending low, she spake, sad voiced and
sweet,

The while gray terror crouched between them
stark,

“Sing now of Aucassin and Nicolete.”

URLYN THE HARPER

IX.

At morning with a little song
She greets the day;
Yet ere the noon has waxèd strong
Her joy's away.

At morn she gathers blooms to grace
The early hours;
Ere noon the sorrow of her face
Withers the flowers.

At morn I see her bravely stand
With lifted head;
None sadder is in all the land
Ere noon be dead.

URLYN THE HARPER

X.

Each day with slower step she goes;
Each day yet whiter burns the rose
Of her white face and fairer shows;

Each day more frail her body seems,
As some pale vision seen in dreams
Of midnight, when the wan moon gleams;

Each day more wildly flame her eyes
Beneath her hair, as evening skies
That lighten as the sad day dies;

Each day I harp before her throne
Of deathless love,—with sigh nor moan
She sits, a figure carved in stone;

Each day I long to bid her shake
The gloom from her young brows, and wake
The love that slumbers for her sake.

URLYN THE HARPER

XI.

I CAME upon her lonely in a tower
About the sunset hour,
Where, gazing oversea, to other lands
She stretched white yearning hands,
The while her breast heaved as a wind-blown
flower.

Dark fell the cloudy tumult of her hair
About her shoulders fair,
As leaning out into the cool she sang
With mournful voice, and rang
Across gray seas the echo of despair.

URLYN THE HARPER

“ O day that slowly withers o’er the sea
I too must die like thee:
Like thee I perish, cold and wan and white,
Within the arms of night,
For ever buried in the dark to be.

“ Yet such a dawn of flashing joy was mine,
O fading day, as thine,
While young in morning meadow-lands I strayed,
A dewy-hearted maid,
To see the light on opening petals shine.

“ But winter came upon me ere the noon;
December frost too soon
Scattered the flowers and struck my heart with
cold
Until I wandered old
And pale and worn and lonely as the moon,

URLYN THE HARPER

“ Old, yea so old in sorrow and in tears,
Though young in course of years,
Like thee I stand within the shade of death
Drooping, with failing breath,
Among dark whispering shadows of grey fears.

“ O death, come thou at fading of the light
To fill my heart with night.
O let me feel thy fingers even now
Laid cold upon my brow.
Dark lies the sea beneath thy plumèd flight.”

URLYN THE HARPER

XII.

At dawn they found her dead,
So cold, so white:
About her wild and red
The morning light:
The dark hair round her head
Heavy with dews of night.

With wondering hands they laid
Her body fair
On her lone bed arrayed
In robes of vair;
While maidens stooped to braid
Once more her cloudy hair.

A black-sailed ship at gloam
Her sorrow bore

URLYN THE HARPER

Beyond the moaning foam
Of this dark shore,
To lie once more at home
At rest for evermore.

*The dark trees shivered o'er the pool of rest
With shuddering murmurs long :
While turning towards the waters of the west
He sang this last wild song :*

Wind shaken are the boughs of sleep
And fallen are the fruits of dream :
No more in vision lands I reap
Vague harvest by the murmuring stream.
In alien lands and lone,
O'er perilous rock and scar,
By ways of man unknown
I follow the unknown star.

FARING SOUTH

TO T. M. AND L. R.

The Goatherd

DOWN all the winding street, from yellow reeds,
With clear, cool treble of hill-waters shrill,
His piping eddies, while his herd at will
Crop as they go the cobbles' scanty weeds.

The dark and narrow ways of builded stone
Shut heavily on them, they know not why;
But he remembers peaks against the sky,
League-blowing airs and northern ranges lone.

FARING SOUTH

The Washer

WHITE-CAPPED, red-armed, low-bending o'er the
stream,

She scrubs and beats and wrings the linen white;

The while, unseen of her,

The dipping swallows stir

The still, dark deeps to surface rings of light,

Slow-spreading ripples circling gleam in gleam.

So, too, low-crouched above the stream of life

Men toil till dark to keep their spirits white,

With fretful labour keen,

The while of them unseen,

The flash of wings and ever-circling light

Stir the calm deeps beyond their fevered strife.

FARING SOUTH

The Harvester

ERECT, with copper-glowing throat and face,
Once more, the home-returning reaper strides,
The while, on wings of morning keeping pace
Along the road with him Life laughing rides.

From some far field of harvest making home,
His rush-wrapt sickle o'er his shoulder slung,
He breathes the deep, keen joy of all who roam
With summer heart a world forever young.

FARING SOUTH

The Stone Breaker

BESIDE the road above his toil he bends,
Nor lifts his head for passing word or smile;
Between slow-dwindling and slow-growing pile
The brown arms swing, the cleaving blow
descends.

The sure-swung hammer strikes with iron clink
Sharp on the ringing flint: in gleaming flakes
The long dark-moulded toil of ages breaks,
And from its heart long-buried sparkles wink.

FARING SOUTH

The Shepherd

WITH folded arms, against his staff he stands,
Sun-soaking, rapt, within the August blaze
The while his sheep with moving rustle graze
The lean, parched undergrowth of stubble lands.

Indifferent 'neath the low blue-laden sky
He gazes fearless in the eyes of noon;
And earth, because he craves of her no boon,
Yields him deep-breasted, sun-steeped destiny.

FARING SOUTH

The Players

THREE urchins tossing coppers by the way,
Squatting brown-limbed and ankle-deep in dust;
Lightly with careless shining brows they play
Unclouded by distrust.

Not dreading overmuch the luckless loss,
Nor oversoon their gainings counting o'er,
With laughing eyes they watch each spinning
toss,
Then fling for luck once more.

FARING SOUTH

The Ploughman

HIS white share spills in dust the hot grey soil,
A hanging smoke about him as he goes:
Yet, stumbling, almost blind and parched he
 knows

Calm ends th' unending furrows of his toil:

A moment's pause beside the liliated pool;
A fringe of shade at turning of the plough
While he shall drain beneath the forest bough
With gurgling throat rich cider's amber cool.

FARING SOUTH

The Thresher

IN the golden dusk of the barn, out of the glare
of the plain,

The soft low thud of the flail, as it falls in the
deep strewn gold:

Then leaping a-swing on the thong, swift-
circling, it falls again,

And falls till the last least ear is beaten and
empty of grain.

After the harvest of Time, when sowing and
gathering tale

In the dim vast garner of Death in soft low
thudding is told,

When we lie in the end beneath the severing
stroke of the flail

Will the grain that our dead days yield for
Time's next sowing avail?

FARING SOUTH

The Wife

WITH laden basket homeward she returns,
Weary from market, with set, patient pace:
In the low sunlight glowing her calm face
Beneath her snow-white cap red-golden burns.

The yellow mud-walls under the brown thatch
At last she sees with kindling eyes a-shine:
With vague brief fears beneath the well-known
 vine
The day-long exile pauses, hand on latch.

FARING SOUTH

The Watcher

HER lithe young body flower-like on the ridge
She stands, with brown hand shading red-gold
eyes—

Agleam like pools that mirror western skies—
And gazes towards the town beyond the bridge.

For whom she watches know I not, nor where
All day he wearied for the dewy gloam
When his bright watchful star should draw him
home

With lighted eyes and sun-entangling hair.

FARING SOUTH

The Mower

BENEATH the droop of willows tall and lithe
The mower moves with circle-sweeping scythe
'Mid hollow-snapping rushes, severed clean,
Which fall in outward raying spears of green.

His swaying body and the flashing blade
Swing on in rhythmic ease from shade to shade
Unstayed, unswerving, slaying without strife—
One chant of dauntless Life and Death in Life.

FARING SOUTH

The Fisher

BENEATH dark-plumèd reeds, a silent grey
And solitary form above the dim
Green-dusking waters where the bright perch
swim
Far down through soundless groves of weed
asway:

With eyes forever on the glooming deep
Unrippling pools of silence yet he stands,
While slowly through the valley meadowlands
Spreads the owl-haunted glimmering haze of
sleep.

La Beause. August, 1901.

Song

As one who plucks a blossom in the dark,
And knowing not the wonder of its hue,
Drinks in the ecstasy of scent and dew;
So I, in ancient dreams, was glad of you.

But now the rising sun has lit the flame,
The blue and gold and scarlet of your pride;
While all men seek your garden, far and wide,
I, hungering, in the wilderness abide.

Yet, when the colour of your life shall fade,
And all the petals of your splendour fall,
When time has shaken down the golden wall,
May I not find you lonely after all?

Vashti

O PALE moon fading in the blue:
O white dawn-wasted flower:
Sole lingering blossom of enwreathèd night
Spent, spent is all thy light,
And all thy power,
The flowing ecstasy of light that drew
The vast adoring sea
In one white quivering flame of wonder unto
thee.

O, if swift sorrow made thee pale,
When, from thy rapt embrace,

VASHTI

The awakening waters to the young dawn
turned;

And all the bright waves burned

For her fresh grace,

Shedding light clouds about her as a veil,

If this thy heart hath torn,

Lean thou from thy far woe unto my grief
forlorn.

For I, as thou, O sister moon,

Have reigned, a happy queen;

A queen through starry rapturous night have
reigned:

As thine my light hath waned,

While yet serene

I dreamed love's glittering night was at the
noon,

VASHTI

Love, changing, fell from me,
As from thy passionate flame the unremembering
 sea.

But one brief hour from my lord's sway
My beauty was withdrawn,
As thou, fair moon, thy snowy light dost shroud
In some wind-sailing cloud,
That hour the dawn,
Breaking in beauty blossomed into day;
And all my splendour paled
Before the glowing youth of her bright form
 unveiled.

O Love, O Love, that couldst not hold
Unfaltering, through the years
Of my frail earthly life for me his heart!
O Time, when thou didst part

VASHTI

Us without tears
So coldly, why didst thou not leave me cold?
Still, still in me at flood
The tide that ebbd in him sweeps surging
through my blood.

And thou, O Queen upon my throne
In bridal robes attired,—
Bright flame of gold where my pale rapture
gleamed,—
Hast thou all thy heart dreamed,
Thy soul desired?
Dost thou remember one who treads alone
The wilderness of fear,
A wandering outcast Queen by salt sea waters
drear?

Yet, yet, O waning, waning moon,
Though, in the sun's bright blaze

VASHTI

The ocean lies forgetful of thy light,
Mysteriously thy might
His motion sways,
May not Ahazuerus in the noon
Feel the deep moving power
Of love that could not die in one disastrous
hour?

The Weaver

ON a pinnacle of air,
Lit by moons invisible,
In a perilous hour I stand
Gathering, gathering!

Sunken is the desolate earth
Into still oblivion,
Whence it sprang to birth;
Fallen are the sea and land;
All that wars in joy or care;
All that battles in the sun.

Like the throbbing of a bell
Down a haunted valley,
Woven of the mist of dream,

THE WEAVER

Shakes the voice unknown ;
Faltering, where the pale moongleam
Stirs the purple of the night,
Laying fingers white
On the veil unpierceable.
Like a terror blown
Down a valley lone,
Where the lowering scars
Hide the flickering stars,
Shakes the voice above me :
Unseen powers move me ;
Set my soul's white wandering hands
Gathering, gathering,
Gathering imperishable
Colours of the sunless lands ;
Set my white hands weaving
Songs of unknown stars with the deep sea's
grieving.

The Weary Singers

(To S. C. C.)

NOT under ever-shifting sails away
Across green-crested waves of wide blue sea,
Beyond the helmèd crags that cleave the bay
And spill the lightest dreaming wave in spray
Above the purple glooms of sunken scars :
Nay, not to-day to be
Poised on the shivering edge of living green
One moment hung, then swerving, deep between
Clear, wavering waters, tremulous with light
Which only veils the vast unfathomed night,
Untroubled of the dim phantasmal day
Or any dream of stars.

THE WEARY SINGERS

Nor on a deep, strong swirling northern stream,
For ever pouring loud and clear and swift
Above bright golden pebbles, all agleam
With netted light, where silver salmon dream,
With quivering fins, of far, tumultuous seas:
Nay, not to-day to drift
Down some blue river 'mid the wild fells born
Unto the pipe of curlews in the morn
Clear-voiced and singing, fed by singing rills
That shrill and gurgle down the craggy hills.
Until one choral chant the waters seem
To move beneath the breeze.

There is no peace in all the wandering sea,
And keen the northern air with stinging life;
While we would rest; at least awhile, to be
Forgetful of the world from which we flee,
Wherein forever surges, without end,

THE WEARY SINGERS

The blind, unceasing strife.
Yea, we are weary of the whirl and din
Of storm-set days and fevered nights, that spin
Fresh sorrows ever for the morrow's dawn;
Weary of tossing heights and gulfs that yawn,
While o'er us, ever curving perilously,
White-foamed disasters bend.

But on still southern waters dreaming deep
With dark, green shadow, never stirred to song
Nor eddying light; where little winds that creep
Through rustling reeds only of deeper sleep
Murmur above the slumber-laden cool,
Throughout the whole day long:
Here, in a scarcely moving, oarless boat,
Awhile we rest, beneath the noon afloat,
As, on the darker waters tranquilly
Under the shadow of eternity,

THE WEARY SINGERS

Fain would we lie, nor ever wake to weep
Above the starless pool.

For we are weary, weary, and would rest:
Yea, hush our harps forever and leave dumb
The singing lyre; till, flows within the breast
Oblivion of the war, that, east and west
And north and south, forever wages fierce:
The strife from whence we come,
Weary of battle and disaster, fain
For peace, to dwell with ancient peace again
Above the dim, cool shadowed pools of peace;
Forgetting woes that cry and will not cease:
And end in silence all our singing quest
Here, where no wail can pierce.

Here would we lie forever without song,
We who have sung till song is weariness,
We who have sung to win release, so long

THE WEARY SINGERS

For hearts crushed songless and lips dumb with
wrong,

Mouths that have bitten sorrow to the core,
And eyes of keen distress.

Till now our songs' flight falters and their wings
Are weary, for none heeds the heart that sings.
Far louder than our chant wrong's clamour rang.
All shall forget us: those for whom we sang,
Would even they remember in the throng,
Though we should sing no more ?

We who of old, within a fair green earth

— Sang unto men beneath the singing stars,
When all the wind-blown ways were full of
mirth

And youth and joy an ever teeming birth,
While men, too glad to hope, ne'er recked of
woe,

THE WEARY SINGERS

Nor desolating wars.

Even when the first bright waves of battle broke
In white of tumult, yet our harps awoke
To chant adventurous deeds of restless life ;
Nor dreamed that unto universal strife,
That feeds on famished hearts and human dearth,
The heat of youth would glow.

Nor dreamed that as the earth grew grey with
age,

Man's innocent cunning should sink into guile,
And learn to mask the hot, wild-face of rage,
With seeming calm ; more deadly war to wage,
In stealthy undercurrents dealing death,
Peace glowing all the while
Upon th' unruffled surface of the tide :
Until, at last, upheaving far and wide,
The sea of life in one fierce tempest vast

THE WEARY SINGERS

Should break, and man with man until the last
Should struggle, yea, and son with son engage
In strife for life and breath.

So thick the soaring reeds, we may not see
The sea-green willows ranged along the shore,
Nor any hill beyond the vale, and we,
Escaped awhile from earth's immensity,
Dream as old gods within a little world
Of peace,—where evermore
Fain would we lie, forgetting all that grieves,
Among the swaying calm of lily-leaves,—
That thrust from glooming depths green spears
 in June,—
But now, through all the peace of summer's noon,
Spread like broad shields, when warriors end-
 lessly
Slumber with banners furled.

THE WEARY SINGERS

May we not too forget who sang in vain?
May we not too forget, as they forgot
The singer and the clear, sky-soaring strain?
The labour and the toil and all the pain,
The darkened noon, the lightning cloven night
Of song remembered not?
Forget awhile the keen, consuming fire
That burned our souls to one white-flamed desire
Among the fierce red passions of the earth?
Forget awhile the hunger and the dearth?
The gaunt and ghostly ever-wailing train
Of sorrows wan and white?

At last, o'er silent waters deep, unstirred
By any singing voice or shrilling pipe,
Or any wakeful noise of beast or bird,
May we not too forget? the while unheard
Of us, beyond the hills, strife rolls afar:

THE WEARY SINGERS

Till sorrow's hour be ripe,
When men, remembering, shall pause and cry:
"Why have the singers left us here to die
Who sang so merrily through all the morn?
Why have they left us, songless and forlorn,
To perish darkling, with no flaming word
Nor song for pilot star?"

Blind

BLOW, blow, O wind the clouds aside
That I may see the stars!
In heaven flashes far and wide
The ruddy shield of Mars:
While Jupiter and Venus ride
The night in glittering cars.

Blow, blow, O wind the clouds aside,
That I may see the stars!
Nay, God has flung His darkness wide
And set the unyielding bars
While day and night unheeded ride
The world in glittering cars.

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THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

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THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

AND OTHER SONG

BY

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1902

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

WITH OTHER POEMS

To E. G.

BY MARY W. B. WOOD

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The Queen's Vigil

I

AMONG her singing maids, within
The garden of the trellised vine,
At angelus Queen Armelin
Drank the rose-fragrant air like wine :
She heard the knell of labour rung ;
She saw the golden sunset-fires
Turn all to soaring flame the spires,
With golden clouds above them hung ;
About her roses idly swung—
Dew-laden censers in the air ;
And weary-hearted maidens sung

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Old melodies of Love's despair
Full-mournfully at day's decline.

She looked across the ridgèd sea
Of basking gables, red and steep ;
The hooded houses tranquilly
Drowsed in a golden haze of sleep ;
No clamour stirred throughout the town,
No murmur from the unseen street
That rang no more to mailèd feet :
She saw the white roads winding down
From the high cornlands, glooming brown
With unreaped harvest over-ripe,
Where summer slept with tarnished crown ;
And but some wandering goatherd's pipe
Shrilled, eddying in the silence deep.

Thus she had watched with longing sore,
When armies climbing to the plain,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Unto the never-ending war,
Had travelled, ere the winter's wane,
With banners blue and harness bright,
That glittered in the frosty sun
Until the valley's crest was won ;
When, fading from her yearning sight,
The blaze of arms in sparks of light
Had perished in horizon grey.
O weary, since, the listening night,
And wearier the watch by day
For banners coming not again !

The while she gazed, the maidens' song
Died on their lips ; and each one breathed
A name, which but a name, too long
With ever-flowering memories wreathed,
In Love's hid chamber of the heart
Had hung : upon the silence came
To Armelin the kingly name

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of Pellinore ; and, like a dart
That cleft the evening calm apart,
New anguish pierced her. " Pellinore ! "
She cried ; yet no fresh tears might start
From eyes wept tearless, though no more
Her lord should come with war-blade sheathed.

Low-bowed as one who, silent, grieves
For some impending woe unknown,
She leant among the trellised leaves,
Crushing the clusters yet ungrown ;
The grapes, unswollen yet and green,
Nor ripened for the gurgling press,
As bitter wine of her distress
Were spilt, beneath her woe, unseen.
The maidens moved not round the queen,
Nor looked on her with pitying eyes ;
For separate sorrows stood between,
Deep-ranged, as serried shades that rise

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Round Love that ever mourns alone.

Then shivered pale the sunset glow ;
And dimly through dew-falling gloom
That veiled the slumbering town below,
She saw the vast cathedral loom,
Grey-pinnacled with shadows cold
Where late had flamed the golden spires.
The glow-worm's emerald signal-fires
Lighted the cool, green dusk, and bold
The bats about the ramparts old
Fluttered with silence-weaving flight :
While drowsily above the mould
The roses swung, and on the night
Unloosed their petalled wealth of bloom.

II

In sorrow sped the darkling hours ;

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

In sorrow dawned the flashing morn,
Awaking bright, belated flowers
To keen, brief days of sunshine born ;
Beneath a cold, star-gleaming sky
To perish, by the swift frost slain ;
Or droop through days of autumn rain :
In sorrow noonday drifted by,
Blue-winged, unclouded, heavily
Over the unreaped harvest-lands :
Once more the bells' clear melody
Rang sweet release to weary hands
That toiled, unmated and forlorn.

No voice within the garden stirred ;
Nor throbbing lute nor quivering lyre,
Nor any song of maid or bird ;
Only the shrill and reedy choir
Of frogs that ever-piping wake
In golden lily-cups afloat

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Upon the dark, unrippling moat,
When, in the deep and grassy brake,
Unseen the armoured crickets shake
Their whirring wings with soothing din.
While each maid mourned for far love's sake,
Alone, untended, Armelin
Stole out, unknown, in veiled attire.

Her white face hid, her head low-bowed,
She passed the gateway guard unseen:
A wavering, grey, uncertain cloud,
She moved the heavy shades between;
Down through the unheeding town she passed,
Threading with eager haste the maze
Of narrow streets and darkening ways;
Till with tumultuous heart at last,
And straining pulses beating fast,
She came to where in sunlight soared
Exultant, pinnacled and vast,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Unto the glory of the Lord
The house of Heaven's eternal Queen.

Still through the glittering blue air
The swallows clipped with flashing wings;
And still the evening light shone fair
On sculptured saints and carven kings;
While, pausing in the golden glow,
She saw how wondering Beauty sprung
From chaos when the stars were young,
Then drooped again to labouring woe;
And how the wind-sown weed may grow
To wreath the crown of stone with green,
And martins build their nest below
The braided head of some proud queen,
Whose fame no wandering harper sings.

Resplendent, through the open door,
She saw the southern rose of glass,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Agleam as if the summer's store
Of cornland flowers that flame and pass—
The poppy red, the cockle blue,
And yellow charlock—gathered there
By angel-hand with tender care,
In fresh, unfading beauty grew,
Imperishably bright and new,
Though now no wind of morning strayed
' Mid opening petals, and the dew
That evening dropped with dreamful shade
Fell only in unflowering grass.

Slow-passing through the portal, soon
She rested in the pillared cool:
As oft 'neath arching boughs at noon,
By some fern-shadowed forest pool,
Her heart had drunk the breathing calm
Of solitude, so now, alone
Among the soaring groves of stone,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

The silence filled her soul like balm.
No longer chant or surging psalm
Waked echoes round the dusky shrine
Of those who bear the martyr's palm,
Which burgeoned in the hands divine
That meekly drove the humble tool.

Above her burned the northern rose
Wherein, enthroned for evermore,
Our Lady of the Seven Woes,
Who earth's grey wreath of sorrows bore,
Reigns; while, with plumage never dim,
The four white doves, with pinions spread,
Enaureoled, hover round her head;
And angel-hosts and cherubim
Before her bow; and seraphim
With radiant many-folded wings
Eternally her glory hymn;
And patriarchs and crownèd kings

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Through everlasting day adore.

Slowly the clustering shadows crept
Round Armelin, so still and white :
And slowly, flowing darkly, swept
Through choir and nave the tide of night ;
Till, looking upward, she could see
The branchèd vault no longer clear,
As though each mighty, soaring pier
Pillared unknown eternity ;
Whence, dropping ever-silently,
Peace fell upon her woe like dew,
And in dark, mournful ecstasy
She dreamed, and comfort filled anew
Her soul long-parched in ruthless light.

Arising, with slow steps she sought
The place where tapers starred the gloom,
Clear and unwavering fires, uncaught

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Within the censers' fitful fume—
Where man's undying worship, ere
The ages out of darkness came,
Had burned a druid-kindled flame.
Thither came Armelin, and there
She kneeled. Upon the wings of prayer
Her faithful spirit fluttering soared,
Lest dawn should bring some fresh despair,
In lonely vigil for her lord
Who strove against embattled doom.

Her white hands folded o'er her breast,
She prayed, and in the dusk they seemed
Like snowy plumes of doves at rest;
While on her hair the gold light gleamed,
Unhindered by her loosened veil,
From countless votive flames that kept
A vigil bright for maids who slept,
For love's lone watchnight all too frail;

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

And over her in moonlit mail,
With blue wings crossed, a seraph shone:
As ever o'er the darkest dale
Burns one clear star when day is gone,
Within the night his glory streamed.

III.

She prayed until the midnight hour
Unceasing, though in weariness
Her head sank, like a drooping flower,
Upon her shadow-broidered dress:
When, clanging loudly through the night,
Full-wide the western door was flung;
And shrill the startled portal rung
With mailed tramp, and quivered bright
With glint of steel and torches' light,
That leapt in flaming tongues of red
O'er war-stained casques and faces white,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

The gold smoke moving overhead,
A glowing cloud above the press.
Slow-wavering through the pillared aisle,
The shadows shrank before the glare,
As if to shelter yet awhile
The queen with her lone sorrow there ;
She rose and looked with pale surprise,
For unto her the pageant seemed
Some strange, bewildering vision dreamed
At midnight, which her waking eyes
Would scatter, as the light that dies
On the low edge of some dark shower,
Or as the gleaming bow that flies
The sun's increasing gold of power
O'er blue seas glittering mile on mile.
But suddenly a new despair
Laid icy clutch upon her heart,
And moved cold fingers through her hair ;

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Within her quivering breast a dart
Of dread more swiftly, keenly stung :
She knew not whence it came nor why,
Only it seemed that she must die ;
Her life for one dark moment hung
Upon a slender thread that swung
Over the still abyss of death ;
Then life's returning tempest wrung
Her bosom, and with sobbing breath
She watched, in silence and apart :

When slowly through the open door
She saw in long procession come
War-weary knights who silent bore
A shrouded form, in sorrow dumb,
On lance-locked shields, that 'neath the weight
Of death's sad burden bended not ;
The fitful torches, flickering, shot
Red gleams about the sombre state

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of him who shelter sought so late
Within the shadowy house of God
From random-flying shafts of fate,
That ever strew the kindred sod
With shattered splendours, pale and numb.

Through all the echoing nave, unstayed,
They moved with solemn pacing slow ;
Before the altar-steps they laid
Their purple-shrouded burden low ;
Then, one by one, about it kneeled—
In silence of heart-breathèd prayer
That struggled blind with blind despair—
Each mailèd knight with head on shield,
Subdued at last in sorrow's field ;
And, sadly, spake a voice forlorn :—
“ Him only unto God we yield.
Here we may watch with him, till morn
Awake the slumbering town to woe.”

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Then from a neighbouring pillar's shade,
Before the words in murmur died,
Moved Armelin, and all dismayed
The knights fell back on either side
As from some midnight phantasy ;
Half-turning in the flickering light,
She stood before them frail and white,
Saying : " Go rest, who faithfully
Have borne my fallen lord to me ;
To-morrow round the stricken throne
Your subject grief may bend the knee ;
To-night my heart would keep alone
The vigil of the widowed bride."

IV.

Unquestioning, they rose, and stole
Into the starry night once more . . .
To Armelin it seemed the whole

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of life closed with the closing door,
That shut without the breathing world.
She only knew that, with sheathed sword,
Before the altar lay her lord,
The banner of his glory furled ;
While yet, above him hovering, curled
The fume of smouldering torches dim ;
And, as she moved, the darkness swirled
About her, till she came to him,
And, bending, murmured " Pellinore ! "

She drew the mantle from his face,
But naught to her the dusk revealed.
With trembling hand she sought to trace
The features hid ; the cold lips sealed
Her fingers touching—swift she pressed
Her own lips to them ; with hot breath
She kissed, as though she strove with death
From his embrace her lord to wrest.

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Awhile, with breast to his cold breast,
She lay, as though in slumber fair,
With low, soft breathing, undistressed.
Unloosened fell her showering hair,
A dim gold cloud upon the shield.

How long in trancèd dream she lay
She knew not ; nor if time swift fled,
Nor whether it were night or day.
She only knew that he was dead,
And waiting o'er : that, in the end,
Because she cried upon his name,
From out the 'wildering night he came
Strife-worn to her, that she might bend
With love o'er him and gently tend
His body through the last calm hours ;
Death waiting by her like a friend.
She only knew that all her powers
Drifted, with ebbing life, away.

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

But as the waking-dream of dawn
Fell, quivering, through the radiant glass,
She rose, and, for a while withdrawn,
She watched the mournful shadows pass
From his white face. Then, with a smile,
She drew his sword and swiftly pressed
Sharp death to her unflinching breast ;
And sank low by his side, the while
Slowly through nave and choir and aisle
The dimness moved, and wan light filled
The dark ; grey pillars, file on file,
Loomed out ; and, o'er the sleepers stilled,
Spread the far roof's high, vaulted mass.

Then all the eastern windows flamed
Triumphal with arising morn,
And sunlight-stricken hues proclaimed
The miracle of day new-born ;
Again within the soaring choir,

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

With sapphire wings no longer dim,
Flashed out the blazoned seraphim,
Burning with sheer, celestial fire ;
With silent harp and muted lyre,
Young angels in clear-shining green
Glowed fresh and bright as love's desire,
Above the sleeping king and queen,
By strife and sorrow overworn.

King Hermaunce

A Chorus

[Hermaunce, King of the Red City, whilst drinking from a spring in the forest after the heat of the chase, was stabbed by his two foster-sons. As he lay sore wounded, a knight rode by, who, seeing the dying king, bore him swiftly to the Red Ship, which rode at anchor in the bay, and laid him on his golden bed therein. With his last breath the King commanded the knight to pen a letter appealing to the knights of King Arthur's Court to avenge his murder. Then the Red Ship put out to sea, the dread missive folded in the hand of the slain King. The vessel came to shore in the mouth of the Humber, and Sir Palomides receiving the fateful summons at once set sail for the Red City, slew the usurpers, and freed the people from their thrall.]

KING Hermaunce puts out to sea ;

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

King Hermaunce of the Red City !

Mariners, mariners, where are your songs when
the wind is filling the blood-red sails ?

King Hermaunce in his Ship of Red ;

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

KING HERMAUNCE

King Hermaunce on his golden bed,
'Tween the low grey sky and the wide grey sea,
the moaning water and wind that wails !

Where are your kinsmen, King Hermaunce ?

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

Who swung the sword and who thrust the lance
In splendid tourney and desperate fray, to win
you honour and pride of name ?

Where is the crown that crowned your head ?

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

Why are your eyes so still and so dread ?

Why is your harness so dulled with blood, and
who hath broken your sword of fame ?

Why did you lag in the greenwood chase ?

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

What is the shadow that covers your face ?

Why are your lips so cold and blue that leant
so red to the spring-waters clear ?

KING HERMAUNCE

Why did you leave your golden throne ?

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

Where are the sons you called your own ?

Who rules your kingdom and lords your house,
and harries the heart of your people with
fear ?

King Hermaunce puts out to sea ;

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

King Hermaunce of the Red City !

How shall the slayer escape the slain ? From
the hand of the dead what cunning shall
save ?

King Hermaunce in his Ship of Red ;

The sea is grey beneath the wind.

King Hermaunce on his golden bed !

The dead shall cry, and the just shall heed, and
the Knight-Avenger shall cross the wave !

The Wanderer

I know not what I follow; yet each morn
My pack I lift, and take the road that leads
I know not whither, through what wilds forlorn,
By what drear waste of winter-flooded meads,
Beyond what snow-bright peaks in lucent airs
upborne.

By raven-haunted pinnacles of stone,
Through vast, eternal solitudes I pass
Where all day long across bleak ridges lone
The keen wind shivers through the withering
grass,
Then dies down craggy aisles with low, cold,
shuddering moan;

THE WANDERER

Through valleys glooming black with leafless
trees;

Across wild uplands, gleaming mile on mile
With billowy drifts that under starlight freeze,
Wave after wave, with no dark, cleaving isle—
Like some untraversed world of unknown polar
seas.

And I have fought the tempest on the height,
The bitter, stinging snow that blinding swirls
Over the moorlands, blotting out the light;
Then, sweeping on, in wilder tumult whirls
Across the further fells with desolating flight:

The while I heard Death moving through the
blast

With dry, cold rustling of deep-drifting snow,
And thought to look upon him and at last
The end of all my wandering to know;
But ever muffled close in cloudy robes he passed.

THE WANDERER

Or by dark winter seas beneath the stars
I strayed, and saw white-curdling waters lash
Along black reefs, whereon grey ribs and spars
Of wrecks forlorn for ever toss and crash
On heaving waves among the jagged, seaworn
scars.

Yet not all-songless lies the way before,
And, though for me the southern-hearted bird
May sing o'er moonlit waters nevermore,
By misty northern firths at dawn I heard
The long, cool-piping call of curlews by the
shore.

And I have seen—when soft the west winds
blow
With kindlier breath, and plumed with dove-grey
showers—
Pale-glinting sunbeams light the perfect bow,

THE WANDERER

Rekindling irised hopes of April hours,
Above wet, glistening wastes of slowly-melting
snow.

I know not what I follow; yet each day
Eternal impulses more keenly urge
My eager steps along the wandering way
That runs unwearied ever on the verge
Of far, gold-quivering dawns, beyond horizons
grey.

From storm to storm, yet brighter from the
stress
Of scathing winds, in me the live flame leaps,
That under laden boughs beneath the press
Of summer hours, beside leaf-shadowed deeps,
Slow sank and smouldered dim, grown dull with
heaviness;

THE WANDERER

While every dream that through the dusky
maze

Of tangled branches fluttered on faint wings
Scales now with eagle flight the windy ways;
Each morn some more triumphal vision springs
To quivering life, and soars with seraph wings
ablaze.

Shall all this winter wandering naught avail—
The perils in the wilderness; the sheer
Snow-silent solitudes of hill and dale;
The day-long strife with elements; the clear
Unfaltering quest of faith along the unknown
trail?

Salve Regina!

ABOVE the forest, fleece on fleece
Of golden cloud and fire on fire
Stream upward from the sinking sun.
In breathless ecstasy of peace
Day dies ; and, all day-labour done
In harvest-field and barn and byre,
The brown lay-brothers troop to prayer ;
And slowly through the echoing choir
Rises the hymn of Mary, where
Rank upon rank, in white arrayed—
Their long day's silence grown to song—
Like spirit-forms the fathers throng,
And, glimmering in the dimness, fade.

SALVE REGINA

Deep-throated through the air
Their chanting surges loud and long :—

Dulcis Virgo Maria,

Ora pro nobis,

Sancta Dei genetrix !

Like poplars swaying in the gloom .
Beneath the wind of evening bowed,
The white-robed monks in silence bend :
Then, rising, through the dusk they loom,
Unto the prayer's low-breathèd end
Chanting yet louder and more loud—
Each brawny, bearded brother strong
With toiling under sun and cloud,
Deep-voiced as wind, thick boughs among ;
Till, as the angelus of rest
Rings out unto the lonely star
That hangs above the cloudy bar
Of purple glowing in the West,

SALVE REGINA

Slow sinks at last the song,
In echoes dying, strange and far :—

Dulcis Virgo Maria,

Ora pro nobis,

Sancta Dei genetrix !

La Trappe, August, 1901.

Tivoli

ACROSS the vast Campagna, coloured still
With shadows of the early flooding seas
That flowed above it in the ancient days,
To Tivoli, a city built in dreams
Above the pillared streams
Of waters falling through the leafy maze
Of sea-green olive trees
That shade with moving dusk her throning hill,
We strayed one April morn.
Behind us lay the legend of old Rome :
The grey, o'erwhelming dome,
Tombing dead empires sprung of deathless
deeds
To sheer disaster. From the storied gloom,

TIVOLI

Earth-mounded triumphs and time-trampled
state,
And memories forlorn
Of battles bright with banners, and the wild
Victorious youth of heroes born
To mighty peril and star-trammelled fate,
We wandered with eyes bright
And hearts a-hunger for the shrill
Cool piping of Italian reeds,
That shook from olive-clouded vale and hill
Ere Italy, clear-dreaming as a child,
Arose and struggled with her splendid doom.

We climbed the hill and wandered through dim
groves
Of olive trees with twisted roots upreared—
Enchanted dryads striving to be free,
Their yearning forms by fiery passion seared ;
And every little leaf of every tree

TIVOLI

Quivered with breath and murmured of old
loves.

Bewildered by vague fears
Of some lone wood-god stirred
From darkling slumber in the deep of years ;
Alert for sounds unheard ;
And quaking at the flight
Of every startled bird ;
We fled across a striding bridge,
And rested panting on a ridge
In showering April light.

Then suddenly before our wondering eyes
We saw, sun-trancèd, rise
Fair Tivoli, a city built in dreams
Unto the music of her falling streams,
That thunder from her craggy steep
And, flashing, plunge where groves of shadow
sleep.

TIVOLI

Through all the murmurous noon we lay,
And watched the rainbow-coloured spray
From snowy tumult leap,
As if some caverned spirit strove to fling
Some living drops on Vesta's pillared height,
To waken once again that early spring
When in her sacred house
From maiden-gathered boughs
The live flame burst to light eternity.

O temple of grey stone
By roving winds o'erblown,
Thine altars cold, thy secret places bare
To every wandering air ;
From northern hills to thee
My spirit turns ;
Thy long-forsaken fire
New-lit within me burns

TIVOLI

With all the keen desire
Of all the virgin eyes that kindled to the light
Through slow, unfaltering days,
Or watched with steadfast gaze
The clear flame leaping in the heart of night.

Wayfaring

I CAME upon her where the poppies lighted
League after league of green with flames of red.
She looked across the windy morn clear-sighted,
With gleaming throat and lily-lifted head,

Like some fresh-waking flower at dawn discovered
Within a lone, wild place of quivering dew.
About her eyes a fluttering laughter hovered,
Then faded as a bird's flight in the blue.

I passed unknown, yet still my heart remembers
Through wandering years—though other faces
 rise
With passionate, burning eyes aglow like
 embers—
The calm of blue winds folded in her eyes.

The Singers

WHEN God had loosed the choral spheres
To sweep through spacious night,
One laggard star that, swerving, soared,
He plucked from out the flight.

He brake its fire between His hands;
It fell in shredded flame:
On bridled winds across the void
The sons of singing came,

To rule the world by right of song,
To raze the forts of death,
And hurl high-throned oblivion down
With storm of chanting breath.

The Eternal Way

O WHITHER goest Thou, little Child ?

From Bethlehem to Calvary.

The way is peril-set and wild,
Thy young feet stumble piteously ;
Turn Thou that I may shelter Thee.

O whither goest Thou, Son of Man ?

From Bethlehem to Calvary.

What bitter doom of fate doth ban
Thy body to the branchèd tree ?
Turn Thou that I may shelter Thee.

THE ETERNAL WAY

O whither goest Thou, fair young God?

From Bethlehem to Calvary.

None follows where Thy feet have trod ;

In Thy lone immortality

No heart of man may shelter Thee.

Song

If once I could gather in song
A flower from my garden of dreams—
The dew from its petals unshaken,
When starry and bright they awaken—
All men to the wonder would throng.

Though ever at dawning I go
By the marge of the life-giving streams
That, shadowed by blossoms upspringing,
Remember the hills in their singing,
The fells of their birth in their flow;

Or early or late though I fare
To gather my garden of dreams
For the barren, forsaken and lonely;
I bring from the shadow-world only
Pale blossoms that perish in air.

The Waters of Lethe

An unending procession of souls descends to the river ;
Shadow-Spirits hover restlessly above the valley.

The Shadow-Spirits.

HITHER they wander with bewildered eyes,
Where no light falls from vague, unmoving
skies ;

Where sun nor moon nor any starry gleam
Pierces the flowing darkness of the stream :
Hither they wander—faltering, crownless kings ;
Queens pale with peril ; warriors battle-worn ;
Strayed, wondering children, frail with earthly
tears ;

Old men and lone, a-weary of wise years
And labourings long ;
Lovers forlorn
From their bright passion torn ;

THE WATERS OF LETHE

And poets rapt with dream,
Whose lips yet quiver with the dying song,
Whose fingers tremble yet among unsounding
strings.

Hither they wander from the light of day
Down to dark waters ; standing on the shore,
They dream awhile of griefs grown old and grey
And sorrows that will shake their hearts no
more ;

Then leaning low
To Lethe's dim, un murmuring flow,
They drink oblivion, gliding far away,
Whither our wavering flight
May never hope to stray.
For we on earth ne'er turned
To any timeless star,
But ever followed far
Each meteor-flame that burned

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Awhile within the night ;
Till, yielding up our breath,
We heard the voice of doom :—
“ Ye shall not pass the gloom
That lies 'twixt life and death ;
But, pale, wind-hovering ghosts,
Shall wander ever the sea
Of darkness washing between
The perilous, pinnacled coasts
Of time and eternity.
In the valley of death shall ye keep
Your vigil, but never of sleep
Shall ye drink, though your dry hearts yearn,
And your grey lips wither and burn ;
Never your sorrow shall lean
To the cool-flowing waters and deep.”

A Warrior.

So swiftly have I travelled from the light

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Into this silent vale of shadowy fears,
Mine eyes yet throb with sun ; the din of fight
Yet pulses in mine ears.
Through the fell forest of the foeman-spears
I rode exulting ; in the clash of swords
I triumphed over battle-famous lords,
And slew the pride of many a glittering knight ;
Till, plunging ever deeper in the stress,
I fell beneath a sure, unswerving blade
Into this valley of forgetfulness,
Wherein I wander, through vast groves of shade,
Seeking the flower of love I cast aside
For flash of swords and banners proud unfurled—
The white flower-face that, in my dream of pride,
Of conquered cities and a cowering world,
I left forsaken.

Lo, before me flows
A stream of deep sweet waters, and my lips,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Thirsting, drink restfulness ; a dull eclipse
Shadows the sun of battle ; bright the rose
Of love unfolds about me, and the gloom
Quivers with opening glories ; darkness glows
To one fire-hearted, splendour-petalled bloom !

Shadow-Spirits.

Beyond the valley shade
He looks with kindling eyes,
Who ever unafraid
Rode under earthly skies,
Nor ever, daunted, turned
From out the path of strife
While yet within him burned
The passionate fire of life.
O that we too might stand
Amid unrustling reeds,
That banner with dark plumes the shadowy
strand !

THE WATERS OF LETHE

O that we too might lean,
The willow boughs between,
To gather in cupped hand
The ever-flowing silence of the river
That, songless, lightless, through the valley
 speeds!

O that we too might glide,
With eager eyes and happy lips a-quiver,
Into the mist that veils the further side!

A Maiden.

Ah, whither, whither hath his spirit fled?
In vain, in vain my fearful, faltering haste
Through the lone hills, across the sunless waste,
Down this deep valley, where I thought to see,
Beyond the shade of each dark, drooping tree,
His bright soul lighting as a flaming sword
The dusky groves of death.
Swift have I followed, but too fleet he sped;

THE WATERS OF LETHE

As e'er on earth amid the warrior-horde
I followed in the triumph of my lord,
Bright-eyed, with panting breath ;
Until one day from the disastrous field
I saw his body on a litter borne ;
But loosened was the soul that would not yield—
His eyes as forest pools of light forlorn ;
And, gazing in their depths, I could not mourn
The broken sword, the battle-riven shield.
My life fell from me as a grief outworn,
And, like a star that flies through perilous night,
My spirit shaken free
Followed his fleet-winged soul in its victorious
flight.

O darkling waters dumbly flowing,
Hold ye the secret of his travelling feet ?
Hath any sun of splendour glowing
Troubled with glories fleet

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Your swift, unrippling flood? Hath any leant
Low in the reeds that shiver on the brink,
Your brimming rapture of deep peace to drink?
O willows, where your pendent branches trail
Unwithering tresses in the flowing stream,
I dip my hands, grown shadowlike and pale,
To lift the waters, dropping without gleam,
Unto my drinking lips. The shadows fail;
Old sorrows scatter as a dream at waking:
O flame of joy, the folded darkness shaking!
O hills of peace that, dawning, calmly rise!
Beneath your shelter, in a dreaming vale,
He waits me with bright welcome in his eyes.

Shadow-Spirits.

One moment pausing with uplifted hands,
Aflame with love she stands;
Then, clothed with love as with exultant light,
She passes from our sight,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

While deeper darkness closes round our woe,
Our woe that never dies,
Though shed in your swift night old sorrows
drown.

O stream of Lethe, all the gathered tears
Of all the travailing world ; grey age's labouring
years ;
The king's cold state ; the poet's burning crown ;
The glittering woe that love's wild rapture weaves
Fall, withering like September-frosted leaves,
By winds unshaken, fluttering idly down,
And mingle in your dark oblivious flow.

An Old Man.

Sleep, sleep at last—untroubled, starless, deep,
Eternal slumber flowing without dream !
O Lethe, long by divers paths and steep
My feet have sought the solace of your stream :
Wearied my soul of straining for the light,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

That never clove the mist with dawning gleam ;
Mine eyes have searched the vast, ærial night,
The glittering desolation of the stars,
The white-ridged winter of the barren moon ;
And looked upon the shadows of the sun.
The mailed earth no secret held for me ;
I pierced the terror of her ancient scars,
The hunger of her heart's devouring fires.
I fathomed ocean's dim-lit mystery ;
And through the glow of man's triumphal noon
I saw the naked bones of his desires,
And how his grief from early joy was wrought,
His peace by passion spun.
With labour keen I taught my feet to climb,
Mine eyes to scan, unflinching, without fear,
The ice-bound pinnacles of space and time :
Yet never from the peak my spirit caught
The flame of wings celestial, or the clear
Ethereal music of god-driven cars,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Nor unto bright, immortal rapture won.
Now, now the false lights fail; vain rumours
cease :

Unto sure rest, at last, forlorn I creep.'
I drink of your unfathomable deep,
O flowing stream of peace !
I sink, I sink in sleep.

The Shadow-Spirits.

Sleep, sleep! O stream, do your dark waters
hold
None other solace for the eyes that weep?
Shall they who sow in sorrow only reap
Thy grey, unflowering, cold
Harvest of shadows and eternal sleep?

A Poet.

O valley, beautiful from time's dim birth,
With feet of white souls passing! O deep
groves,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Still tremulous with the gust of passionate flames
Of song-remembered loves,
And heroes whose bright names
Still kindle in the memory of the earth !
O Lethe flood,
At touch of whose swift waters the frail bud
Of earth-born beauty breaks into unwithering
 flower !
Amid your glooms I follow, follow still,
Beauty, whose wandering strays
My feet have ever sought through life's dream-
 haunted ways ;
Beauty that, earthward raining hour by hour,
Lights in a dewy shower
In some green dell, and flows
From flower to tree,
From tree to forest-covered vale and hill,
Flooding the earth with ecstasy, and glows
From valleys unto uplands peaked with snows ;

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Then, streaming higher,
Flushes her native skies with cloudy fire,
That, falling, drowns in the all-gathering sea,
To dawn a moon-pale spirit in the night.

O ever-flowing colour, changing form,
Wind-flying flame, blue-soaring melody,
The star of love's bright being and the light
On sleeping children's faces,
Bloom of the desert places, the wild gleam
Cleaving the midnight fury of the storm—
Beauty that, flying, taught my feet to follow
Through winter waste, and summer-dreaming
hollow :

Your torch hath lighted even death's still gloom,
And led where shadows brim
Dark Lethe's silent stream.

O waters dim
With old heroic sorrow, starless grief,

THE WATERS OF LETHE

That drank of you oblivion's dull relief,
Steal not from me, with slumber-breathing fume,
Or soul-dissolving dream,
The gleaming wind, the flower, the flying star
My life has followed through lone years and far.

Cool, cool the waters to my lips ; a veil
Falls from mine eyes ; beyond the gloom I see,
No longer faltering, frail,
The sheer, divine imperishable might
Of Beauty thronèd in eternity.

The Shadow-Spirits.

O that our wings might tire
And falter in their flight ;
The wandering desire
Die down within our breast
The keen, devouring fire

THE WATERS OF LETHE

Perish in your deep night !
We crave no rapture bright,
O stream, beyond your shore ;
Only for evermore
To drink, 'mid pale souls leaning, of your dark
waters rest.

Elegy

UNLOOSE the eager boat ;

Let her white sails unfurl
Where amber islands float
In sunset seas of pearl.

Too long her restless prow
Has chafed on alien strands ;
The night shall waft her now
Beyond bleak, mortal lands.

Where azure deeps afar
Break into golden foam,
Will dawn the pilot star,
To draw her glad sails home.

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